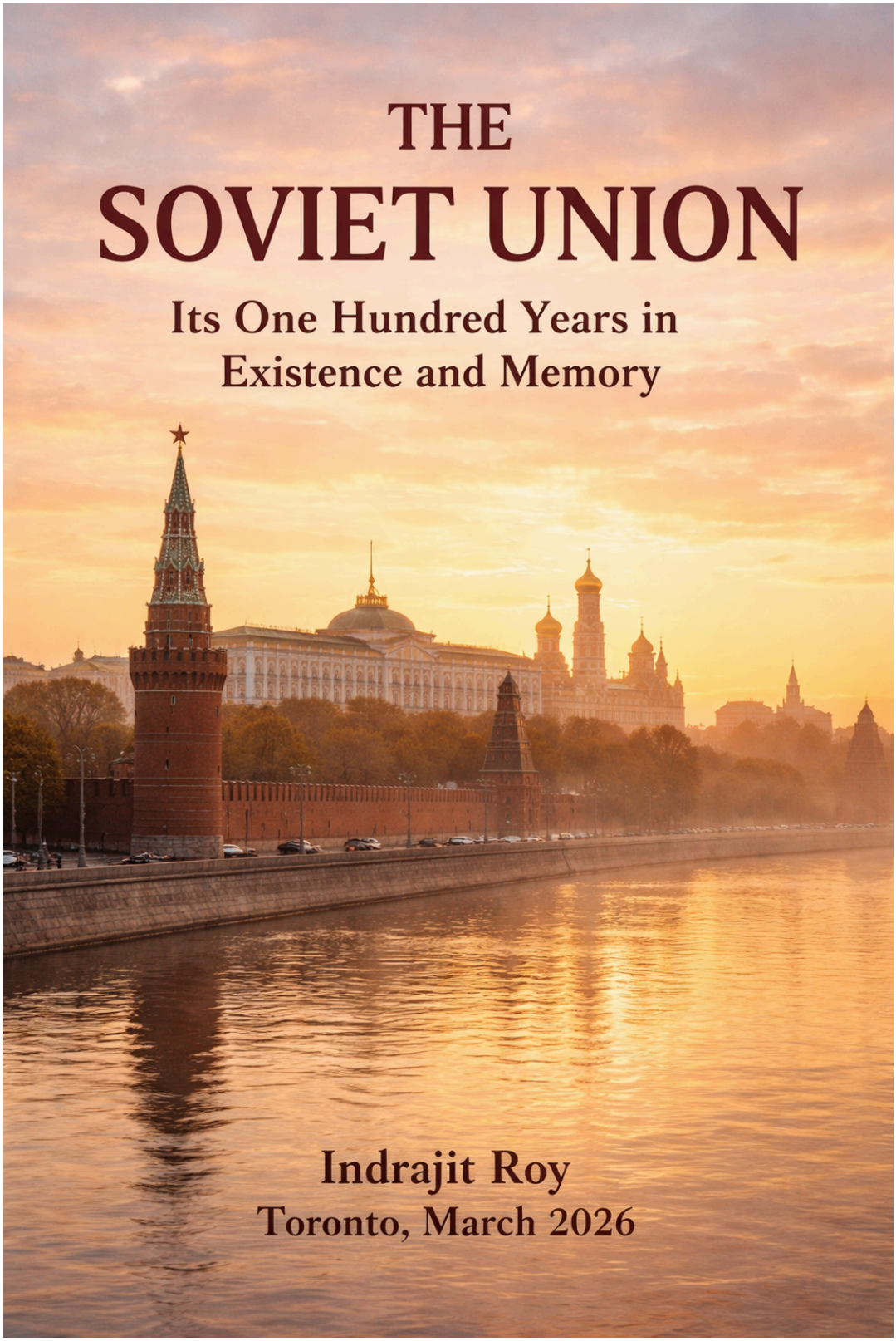
THE
SOVIET UNION
Its One Hundred Years in
Existence and Memory
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Introduction

The year 2022 marked the hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), a vast Eurasian state that existed in the past century. The country stood out from other contemporary nation states by its unique characteristics. The three key distinctive features of the USSR were absence of ownership, profits, and consumerism. It was the world's largest country spreading from Europe to Asia; from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean; from the Arctic to the Black sea. Marxist ideology underlies its values, structure of the economy and relations among different groups in the society shaped by socialized production. Its interaction with the outside world was guided by proletarian internationalism which in international relations meant support for socialist revolutions as well as national liberation movements worldwide. Because of this its global outreach was extensive and its soft power to shape and influence global events was also considerable.

In the past century the Soviet Union's existence mattered decisively for many reasons. It played a decisive role in saving the world from the scourge of Nazism during the Second World War. It helped many countries break free from long colonial rule and consolidate their independence by supporting their economic growth and development. Many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America benefited from the Soviet Union's wide-ranging material technical assistance. Among the beneficiaries of its assistance, most notables were today's major economic powers such as China and India. As a result, many countries, societies, as well as individuals worldwide, particularly those who studied in that country could still feel how the Soviet Union left its mark on their destinies.

Of the hundred years, the state was in existence for seventy years. The remaining thirty years is about its absence from reality. Naturally, the two time periods evoke different perceptions of the USSR and also resonate differently in different parts of the world. The first time period was about a new beginning which had no precedence in human history. It was about the dramatic rise of a country from backwardness to heights of advancement. It was propelled by stunning achievements in education, science and technology, art and culture and the wider economy. A development path that would have taken one hundred years to pass was passed ten times faster in a decade, as Soviet leader Yosif V. Stalin famously noted the achievements. The power of collectivism in lifting a country from widespread poverty, deprivation and illiteracy was on full display.

This period also witnessed the transformation of the country into a superpower with extensive global outreach. It was backed by military might as well as considerable soft power rooted in Marxist socialist ideology to shape and influence global events. The second period is the reverse of the first. It began with colossal human tragedy, civil war, steep decline and national humiliation of epic proportions following disintegration of the country. But it is also a story of coming back, rebuilding the society, and reclaiming its status on the world stage. The second period provides valuable lessons and insights about what went wrong, which assumptions were invalidated, and what else could have been done differently in the first period that wouldn't have led to the second period.

For many in the world, particularly for the generation which has witnessed a part of the first period and is witnessing the second period of resurgence, the perception of the USSR is essentially one of a balanced approach between ideology and pragmatism. It is also true, the way the USSR resonates with the outsiders differs from how it does with its own people, who were born, grew and destined to live their entire lives in their own country. Their perceptions were shaped by everyday life, the experiences of living in a real-world context with its own opportunities as well as limitations. Unlike the outsiders, their perception was shaped not only by official narratives about their country, society, and its place on the global stage; but also and most importantly, from collective memory of the family which in many cases differed somewhat from the official version pronounced from party congresses and written in history books.

To many in the outside world, the Soviet Union embodied progressive ideals. It realized Karl Marx's dream of an equal and classless society. The country became a synonym for emancipation from exploitation. Its socio-economic system was held as an example to be replicated in other parts of the world. But to many Soviet citizens, this narrative was balanced by nuances about how the great social upheaval was handled during transition from the old order to new order. The tremendous force that was applied to destroy the old society and build in its place a new one had spillover effects in people's minds which survived generations and shaped attitudes to their country.

The Soviet society that took shape after the emergence of the USSR and completion in the mid-1930s of Stalin's fast-paced programme of construction of socialism was not a monolithic one, although it visibly seemed so. The class of "exploiters" which owned and exerted control on all means of production (industries, factories, land, and natural resources) was eliminated. Orthodox-Christian church, source of national pride in Tsarist Russia, was disempowered and marginalized to pave the way for building a secular socialist society based on atheism. The political class including the bureaucracy was also destroyed.

There were many who couldn't accept the revolution. Some chose to emigrate. But many decided to stay and become stakeholders of the new system because there was demand for their skills, knowledge and experience. They were needed to build an alternative economy based on central planning and socialized ownership of the means of production. Although experienced party leaders provided political guidance and the new generation of administrators and managers rising from the working class started emerging, the remnants of the old system retained levers to influence decision making, particularly in running the state-controlled socialized economy. They even made their way to the top through the ranks of the party-administrative bureaucracy.

The fact that they and their descendants got along with the authorities doesn't necessarily mean they became adherents of Marxism-Leninism. So, the visible monolithic fabric of Soviet society had hidden fault lines. It had a latent undercurrent of disagreement, dissatisfaction and a desire for changes in how the country was run and the economy managed. Even many who chose to become members of the ruling Communist Party did so because they wanted an avenue to enter the administrative-party bureaucracy. As a result, for many Soviet citizens a sort of dual world existed with regard to the views

they held about their country and society. They benefited from the advantages of the socialist system and took pride in their country's achievements, particularly its superpower status. But many were equally mindful of the past. But that was kept in the personal realm and not openly transpired so long as the state was strong and had effective control on the society.

This mindset which was characteristic for many Soviet citizens had consequences for the society. It weakened emotional attachment and the sense of belonging to a common home, which was the Soviet Union. Partly it explains why a large majority of Soviet citizens chose to be silent spectators and many took the side of the uprising led by Boris Yeltsin when ill-fated reforms initiated in 1985 triggered a cascade of events culminating in the disintegration of the USSR in 1992. But that was the initial response. Thirty years later, the situation is different because time has left its imprint. Many assumptions about a change for the better to be brought about by overthrowing one-party authoritarian rule and dismantling socialism did not only fail to materialize but also backfired.

Privatization of the vast publicly-owned Soviet economy in the early 1990s was ill conceived and poorly handled. It didn't lead to the emergence of the Western-model market economy. On the contrary, it led to de-industrialization of the country with millions of workers thrown out of jobs. Public assets such as industrial enterprises, mines, oil and gas fields, land became concentrated in the hands of a few. It gave birth to a class of super rich, known as oligarchs. The social unrest that followed spawned localized bloody civil wars. The project for replacing socialism and one-party rule with liberal democracy and market economy failed. All attempts to integrate with the West with even a semblance of an equal partner were rebuffed.

Emergence of the USSR

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was conceived not only as a nation state but also as the centre of global proletarian revolution. The founder of the Soviet Union, V.I. Lenin was convinced that following Russia's example, the working classes in other countries of Europe, such as Germany, France, Great Britain and elsewhere would rise up. They would take power in their hands and come forward in support of the Soviet state in the common cause of spreading socialist revolution worldwide. Therefore, considerations for an extended global outreach dominated Lenin's thinking in choosing the appropriate model for reorganizing the historical Russian state into an internationalist proletarian state. It is evident from the last paragraph of "Declaration", which was the introduction to the "Treaty on formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics". The reference to the World Socialist Soviet Republic is remarkable.

"The will of the peoples of the Soviet republics, who recently gathered at the congresses of their Soviets and unanimously decided to form the "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics", serves as a reliable guarantee that this Union is a voluntary association of peoples with equal rights, that each republic is guaranteed the right to freely secede from the Union, that access to the Union is open to all socialist Soviet republics, both existing and emerging in the future, that the new union state will be a worthy crowning of the foundations laid back in October 1917 of peaceful cohabitation and fraternal

cooperation of peoples, that it will serve as a sure bulwark against world capitalism and a new decisive step towards the unification of the working people of all countries into the *World Socialist Soviet Republic.*

Воля народов советских республик, собравшихся недавно на съезды своих советов и единодушно принявших решение об образовании "Союза Советских Социалистических Республик", служит надежной порукой в том, что Союз этот является добровольным объединением равноправных народов, что за каждой республикой обеспечено право свободного выхода из Союза, что доступ в Союз открыт всем социалистическим советским республикам, как существующим, так и имеющим возникнуть в будущем, что новое союзное государство явится достойным увенчанием заложенных еще в октябре 1917 г. основ мирного сожительства и братского сотрудничества народов, что оно послужит верным оплотом против мирового капитализма и новым решительным шагом ло пути объединения трудящихся всех стран в Мировую Социалистическую Советскую Республику".

However, the beginning for the Bolshevik Government was fraught with many challenges. The country it inherited from the Russian empire was no longer a coherent state. It started disintegrating after the overthrow of the emperor's rule and assumption of power by the Provisional Government in early 1917. After the revolution, a big challenge for the Bolshevik Government was to exert control on territories. In effect, it was about managing the slide of the country into a spiral of territorial disintegration. The Government led by V.I. Lenin tried to do this by granting independence to major province-like entities such as Finland and Poland, which was already granted independence by the Provisional Government. It announced a new legislation on 2 November 1917 titled "Declaration of the rights of workers and exploited people", which included the right of self determination. It provided a legal cover on redistribution of lands belonging to historical Russia. Exercising this right, a significant chunk of Russian territories in Caucasus, Far East, Central Asia as well as other Slavic parts of the empire (which later became Ukraine and Byelorussia) separated and formed their own national states. In many of them Soviet power retained considerable influence. The Bolshevik Government, led by V.I. Lenin reorganized whatever landmass of the former empire was left into the first Soviet state in 1918.It was named as the "Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR)".

The other challenge was to handle the civil war which erupted after the revolution. The war engulfed the entire country. On one side fought the Red Army defending the Bolshevik revolution and on the other side fought the White Army which wanted to restore the monarchy. The civil war continued for five years ending in 1922 with the victory of the Red Army and establishment of Soviet power all over the country. As the civil war was approaching an end, V.I. Lenin engaged Bolshevik party leadership in debate about the final structure of the state. It was supposed to incorporate all Soviet republics that emerged as a result of victory of the Red Army. Accordingly, the USSR was founded as a voluntary union of four Soviet republics: the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), the Ukrainian SSR, the Belorussian SSR, and the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic following signing of a treaty by representatives of these republics. The treaty took effect on 30 December 1922.

The treaty left the door open for admitting new territories under the former Russian empire. After the end of WWII, according to the terms of ending the war, new territories were incorporated into the USSR. The German city, Konigsberg, became the westernmost outpost of the Soviet Union on the Baltic Sea and renamed Kaliningrad. The Ukrainian SSR expanded westward through annexation of territories belonging to Poland, Hungary, and Romania which are collectively known as Western Ukraine. In the Far East, four Japanese islands north of Hokkaido – Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and Habomai – were annexed as South Kuril district of Sakhalin region. Thus, the Soviet state building which the founder of the state, V. I. Lenin, initiated in 1922 was completed by his successor Yosif V. Stalin in 1945. Geographically, Stalin almost restored the former Russian empire, in fact, created the Soviet equivalent of the former Russian empire.

While acquisition of new territories, among other advantages, boosted the USSR's defence capabilities, it also added challenges. A major challenge was incorporating inhabitants of those territories into Soviet society, which was alien to them. Many inhabitants never accepted attributes of the Soviet society and didn't hesitate to display it in public. Deep in heart, they remained hostile to Russian culture and language. Far from enriching the society, new acquisition of territories was more of a destabilizing factor sowing cracks in the existing Soviet society. Ukraine is the best example. Western Ukraine was too different from Eastern and Southern Ukrainian lands to co-exist within the borders of a single country.

USSR: Remaking of the Russian empire

The USSR, above all, was remaking the Russian empire to fit the mold of the Bolshevist Party's worldview. In that worldview, the national identity of the empire, which was Russian, was seen as an obstacle to realizing its global ambition. It was actively supporting the global working class under the banner "Proletariat of all countries unite" to topple capitalism and replace it with Marxist socialism. Going forward with implementing this worldview required the Bolshevist Party leadership to rupture the bond with which emperors held together numerous ethnic groups with distinct culture, language, and religion in a single country, which was governed as a unitary state. That was Russification. Officially it didn't aim to strangle ethnic identity of peoples. It was viewed as something benign and natural because of the dominance of Slavic culture, the Russian Orthodox Christian identity and the Russian language being the language of communication. There was some kind of recognition of distinctness of population groups based on ethno-cultural identity. But that was kept in check and not allowed to grow into a full-fledged consciousness of national identity.

V.I. Lenin equated Russification to Great Russian chauvinism. He considered it as a tool for oppression of minority ethnic groups subjugating them under colonial rule. By declaring the rights of the peoples of Russia which included the right of self determination, the Bolshevist Government led by V.I. Lenin, eliminated the centrality of the Russian identity. It was brought at par with national self-consciousness of other ethnic groups inhabiting the Russian empire. Apparently it looked like undoing a historical injustice by creating conditions for equalization of all peoples regardless of their ethnic origin, which was a key

message of the October Revolution. In reality, it spelled death knell for the historical Russian state by accelerating its disintegration along ethnic affiliations.

Proletarian internationalism couldn't suppress aspirations of non-Russian ethnic groups to assert their national identity and establish self-rule. To them the end of the emperor's rule had more significance. It gave them the opportunity to break free from the dominance of Russian identity symbolized by the empire. The revolution's message of equality, fraternity and self-determination was an added advantage for them. They leveraged it to assert their own distinct identity which was suppressed by Tsarist rule. This situation didn't change much after the Red Army defeated White counter-revolution in all national republics establishing supremacy of the Soviet power. Bolshevist leaders in those republics had to accommodate aspirations of local populations to exert control on the affairs of their republics.

The beginning of the 1920s saw the former Russian empire fragmented into several Soviet republics which were virtually independent. When V.I. Lenin took the initiative of uniting all these republics in a single state, differences of opinion surfaced in the party leadership as to how it could be achieved. Yosif Stalin recommended "Autonomization of republics'', which was quite simple. According to this plan, formally independent republics were supposed to enter the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic with the rights of autonomy. It proposed transforming the institutions representing RSFSR's state power into central institutions of Soviet power exercising control over formally autonomous republics. But the national republics, particularly Georgia and Ukraine expressed their reservation to this model of integration.

V.I. Lenin was also against Stalin's plan. In his view, inclusion of national republics in RSFSR particularly against the will of its leaders would have placed Russians in the same role as emperors. It would thus frustrate the idea of voluntary union of nations. In other words, it would have restored the previous Tsarist empire in all but name against which the Bolsheviks fought so vehemently. At that time, Lenin's influence in the Bolshevik Party was so great that ignoring his views on the construction of the united Soviet state was impossible even for Yosif Stalin, the influential number two in the leadership of the Party. As a result, the USSR was born as a federation of four Soviet republics. It symbolized V.I. Lenin's worldview of a multinational state supposed to be the citadel of global socialist revolution. It was established on the principles of self-determination, equality, fraternity, and proletarian internationalism binding various nationalities in a single state.

USSR: perceived weaknesses in its construction

At the moment the Soviet Union was founded, few could have imagined that someday it could fall apart much in the same way the Russian empire did. That was the moment when revolutionary idealism reigned supreme. Many real-world issues of state building were sidelined. What was unthinkable then, unfortunately, happened just seventy years later. In this context, it is tempting to ask whether there were faults in how the Soviet state was built that might have contributed to its disintegration. This question arises because the end of the Soviet Union was precipitated by invoking a provision of the Soviet constitution. It was article 72 that proclaimed "For each Union Republic, the right of free exit from the

USSR remains". It was so clear-cut that there was no restraining element, for example, a clause on how exactly it could be done; which conditions need to be fulfilled before this constitutional provision could be invoked. How else can this article be considered other than a time bomb planted under the foundation of the Soviet state?

What could have happened if the Soviet state were constructed based on the principle of autonomy advocated by Yosif Stalin. It considered absorbing national republics in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) with the rights of autonomy. In hindsight, it can be reasonably argued, it would have deprived would-be perpetrators seeking disintegration of the Soviet state taking advantage of a constitutional tool for doing so. Besides, it could have other advantages. For example, inclusion of national republics in RSFSR, which was an existing federation of Soviet autonomous republics, could have made the country more cohesive. It could have restrained centrifugal tendencies typical for a multinational state. More importantly, it could have provided a real national identity besides global outreach symbolized by proletarian internationalism. Specifically, it could provide a limit for expression of ethnic nationalism that wouldn't have transcended the common identity binding numerous nationalities together, which was Russian.

The USSR, in contrast, was an extra layer of federation on top of the existing Russian Soviet Socialist Federation. Adding another layer of federalism carried enormous risks for the integrity of the Soviet state. On one hand, it increased the layers of bureaucracy that unnecessarily duplicated functions. On the other hand, it made the state vulnerable to manipulation by ambitious regional leaders. The central leadership often tackled it by reaching unofficial understanding with them on many sensitive issues. Thus apparently a strong powerful state, the second superpower, the USSR was, in effect, a federation of sovereign national republics with constitutional right to secede from the Union. It was a sort of gateway to admit other Soviet national republics from the former Russian empire. While the RSFSR and other Soviet national republics were natural countries, the USSR was not. It was artificial, more akin to the European Union of modern times. It was established by agreement which the four Soviet republics signed on 30 December 1922.

Reaching that agreement wasn't easy. It took five years after the revolution. This period was marked by civil war, emergence of Bolshevist Party as the dominant political force in all republics and lengthy negotiations to agree terms and conditions for forming the Union. The only common ground was, of course, commitment to the ideals of the October revolution and Marxist socialism, and accordingly restructuring the economy and the society. However, when it came to details, the national Soviet republics were adamant to preserve the wide range of autonomy, which they gained since the fall of the empire. In other words, it was a bargain for the national republics to retain as much of their independence as possible and extract concessions from the nucleus republic, the RSFSR, before entering the Union. The most sensitive issue was territory and redrawing of borders between the republics.

The biggest concession from the Russian Federation was handing out historical Russian lands to these republics under various pretexts. The process was arbitrary at the discretion of top party leadership. It traditionally went ahead without seeking people's endorsement. In those days, the conventional wisdom

was that whatever the Party does, it does so in the interests of the people. V.I. Lenin took a personal lead in giving up large chunks of Russian land to Ukraine, such as the region of Donbass, Novorossya, and Malorossya (Odessa, Kherson, Nikolayev, and other areas) along the Black Sea coast which had a majority Russian-speaking population. The latest giving away of Russia's iconic landmass to Ukraine occurred in 1954. At the initiative of the then Soviet leader, Nikita S. Khrushchev, the Presidium of USSR Supreme Soviet issued a decree on 9 March 1954 on transfer of the Crimea region from composition of the Russian SFSR to Ukrainian SSR. The reason shown was territorial proximity, close economic and cultural relations between Crimea region and Ukrainian SSR in a common economy (shown below).

ВЕДОМОСТИ
ВЕРХОВНОГО СОВЕТА
СОЮЗА СОВЕТСКИХ СОЦИАЛИСТИЧЕСКИХ РЕСПУБЛИК

9 марта 1954 г. № 4 (798) Год издания 17-й

УКАЗ ПРЕЗИДИУМА ВЕРХОВНОГО СОВЕТА СССР

О передаче Крымской области из состава РСФСР в состав УССР

Учитывая общность экономики, территориальную близость и тесные хозяйственные и культурные связи между Крымской областью и Украинской ССР, Президиум Верховного Совета Союза Советских Социалистических Республик **постановляет:**

Утвердить совместное представление Президиума Верховного Совета РСФСР и Президиума Верховного Совета УССР о передаче Крымской области из состава Российской Советской Федеративной Социалистической Республики в состав Украинской Советской Социалистической Республики.

Председатель Президиума Верховного Совета СССР К. ВОРОШИЛОВ.

Секретарь Президиума Верховного Совета СССР Н. ПЕГОВ.

Москва, Кремль. 19 февраля 1954 г.

Similarly, a large number of Russian cities and provinces were ceded to the Kazakh Soviet republic. These include Akmolinsk (renamed in Soviet era as Tselinograd, now "Astana, the capital city); Verkhny (later renamed as "Alma-Ata"), Perovsk (later named "Kzil Orda); Semipalatinsk, Kustanai; Aktubinsk, Karaganda, Petropavlovsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk. Russian lands were ceded to some other Soviet republics too.

While such territorial adjustments of historical Russian lands were made under various pretexts, the assumption was that it was still one country and for that matter internal borders meant little. After each Soviet republic made sure they had got what they wanted from Russia in terms of territory and control on running affairs in their own republic, they agreed to form the Union keeping the right to leave the Union any time they wished. So, the narrative that was developed to present the USSR to the world was that "It was a voluntary union of fraternal republics akin to a family founded on the ideals of Marxist socialism underpinned by proletarian internationalism." The state emblem that was chosen had nothing

to show about its inheritance of historical Russia. It was a sickle and hammer held together on the background of a globe with a red star shining on top and the slogan “proletariat of all countries unite” inscribed at the bottom. The message was clear. The USSR was not only a nation state confined within its own borders, but it also had a revolutionary global outreach, which was no less important.

For the working class and oppressed peoples across the world, the USSR emerged as a beacon of hope in their struggle for emancipation from capitalist exploitation and building just and equal societies. However, internally the appeal of ideology had limits. It was probably the reason for the Union Treaty to begin with a chapter titled “Declaration”. Apparently it provided a rationale for establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics contrasting the weaknesses of the capitalist camp with the strengths of the socialist camp in resolving the issue of nationality in a multinational state. In hindsight, it seems the “Declaration” was an attempt to submerge in the sea of internationalism and brotherhood uneasy aspects of nationalism and use it as a bond for drawing national Soviet republics around a common globalist purpose. In other words, proletarian internationalism was supposed to keep the proliferation of nationalist sentiments under check and with time make them irrelevant.

As we would see later, this assumption had flaws. It worked at the beginning, but later its appeal gradually faded away. It happened because national Soviet republics saw a clear stake for them in proletarian internationalism at the beginning. After the revolution, Soviet Russia inherited from the empire regions at varying levels of socio-economic development ranging from budding capitalism in European parts to feudalism in Trans-Caucasia, Central Asia and Far East. Socialism’s key goal of eliminating exploitation of the working class and achieving equality in the society required unprecedented transformative actions to lift backward regions from poverty, illiteracy, and underdevelopment.

V.I. Lenin framed this challenge as propelling these regions from feudalism to socialism directly bypassing the capitalist stage of development as experienced in European parts of the former empire. If the ideological spin is taken off from this narrative, the challenge assumes massive transfer of resources as well as technical expertise from the Russian Federation to these regions to do this heavy lifting. In other words, it demanded tremendous sacrifices from the Russian people for an unlimited period to build from scratch modern infrastructure and utilities – roads and highways, schools and universities, hospitals, clinics, industries, new population centres, land improvement and irrigation structures, and so on.

Accelerating their socio-economic and cultural advancement with Russia’s enormous material-technical assistance was the key incentive for the national republics to enter a union with Russia in the form of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). They were quite happy to accept the official interpretation that the USSR was a family of fraternal republics so long as resource transfer from Russia occurred smoothly to satisfy their development needs. For the Russian Federation, sharing of its own resources with the “brothers” meant forgoing a significant chunk of its own development. If those investments were made in less developed regions of Russia, it would have made important differences for the Russian people. For example, it would have spared more resources for spending in the civilian sector to increase production of consumer goods as well as a variety of processed foods, the shortages of which

since the late 1970s bred resentment among the population. However, the generous support that flowed from the Russian people beginning in the late 1920s during the period of construction of socialism through the post-war reconstruction period started facing scrutiny from the Russian people in the 1980s. During this period economic growth slowed and widespread shortages of many consumer goods started surfacing.

In this context, the appeal of proletarian internationalism was losing steam. It was seen as a code for unilateral sacrifices from the Russian people to support development in “fraternal” republics. In the face of economic difficulties, many Russians became sceptical about the utility of draining their own resources to support development elsewhere which could be better spent at home. But did proletarian internationalism demonstrated by Russian people in lifting national republics succeed in suppressing nationalism? Contrary to the official narrative, the result was closer to the opposite. As discussed in the foregoing, in the Tsarist Empire many ethnic groups cohabitated in a single state where some kind of recognition of distinctness based on ethno-cultural identity was recognized, but that wasn’t allowed to grow into a full-fledged consciousness of sub-national identity.

That changed when major ethnic groups had their own territories bound by borders. It was a potent symbol for ethnic nationalism to survive, gain strength rather than to ebb, although its expression wasn’t so obvious. It also provided a powerful impulse to rekindle consciousness in those societies, which for long remained obscure, to rediscover their own tribal culture and traditions and to reconnect with them. During the emperor's rule those ethnic groups could live with dual identity – the overall umbrella “Russian” identity and their own ethno-cultural identity without clash. But achieving the status of a constituent Union republic was a great temptation to seek what separated them from the Russians rather than what united them. But it is not to deny the important role that the Cultural Revolution, one of the three pillars of construction of socialism in the mid-1930s, played in the national republics in support of internationalism at least at the beginning.

Proletarian internationalism was more than a vehicle for resource transfer from the RSFSR to national republics. It was seen by Soviet leadership as the instrument to reach the key goal of socialist nation building in the USSR – evolving a single nationhood under the umbrella” Soviet” identity. The assumption was that if proletarian internationalism were allowed to run its course, it would result in a society that is prepared to take the next higher step of socialist development – communism. In that society, greed and consumerism would have no place; the national wealth would be distributed fairly according to individual needs; and there would be no classes. Religion would cease to exist as a factor in culture paving the way for a secular, atheist society built on common humanist values transcending religion.

In reality, it was too big a call to have any chance to succeed. The Russian empire was too vast and ethnically too diverse a country. In the Slavic republics with dominance of Orthodox Christianity, it was, theoretically at least, possible to achieve some kind of uniformity. But in Central Asia mired in feudalism with its societies divided along tribal/clan lines and Islam as being the dominant religion, uprooting people from their traditional customs and practices and merging them in the same stream with the

Christian European part wasn't a realistic option under any circumstances. But it was tried by use of force. Religion was pushed to the fringe of the society and exiled from the cultural realm. The "clergy" as a class was eliminated. As part of the Cultural Revolution, thousands of places of worship – churches, cathedrals, mosques, etc. were repurposed as "palaces of culture (дворец культуры)" to promote Soviet common national culture (Советская общенародная культура).

To say that those investments in evolving a common Soviet national identity entirely went in vain wouldn't be true. Contours of a common national Soviet culture took shape thanks to fusion of the riches of Russian culture of the past with global cultural values as well as those of the societies of national republics. The religious Orthodox component of the Russian civilization was mainly transformed into a socio-ideological socialist (communist) one with the preservation of such traditional moral values as communality, spirituality, conscientiousness, and supremacy of statehood. As a result, everywhere in the USSR, there was strong visibility of Soviet-style secular culture. Nevertheless local customs, traditions, including religion didn't vanish altogether, but survived like a latent undercurrent. It was a strong barrier to sub-national cultures being dissolved in a single identity, the supposed Soviet nationhood. It assumed all citizens of the USSR regardless of where they live in the country would identify them with the USSR as their motherland (Советская родина).

But grand ideas can't turn into reality unless reinforced by concrete actions on the ground. That came from the resettlement of thousands of Russian professionals (teachers, educational workers, doctors, nurses, engineers, technicians, skilled workers, etc.), who were at the forefront of socialist nation building in Central Asia, trans-Caucasia and other less developed regions. As a result, in cities like Tashkent, Alma-Ata, Bishkek, Baku, Dushanbe, Ashkhabad, a sizable presence of Russians was built up. Conversely, ethnic minorities also settled in many regions of the Russian Federation. This coming togther of diverse nationalities around a common identity got a major boost during the Second World War, in which troops from all corners of the country fought shoulder-to-shoulder to defeat Nazi Germany and win the war decisively. Post-war restoration of war-ravaged cities, towns, industries, agricultural farms and reconstruction of infrastructure was an opportunity for the Soviet leadership to cultivate the sense of oneness - belonging to a common Soviet motherland.

One such project was "Development of virgin lands (Освоение целины). Launched in 1954,the project spread over a huge swath of land covering six administrative divisions (область) of Kazakhstan with a total area of more than 600 thousand square kilometres, little more than the size of a country like France. The total target for bringing fallow fertile grasslands under cultivation in this huge territory was set at 250 thousands square kilometres which exceeded the size of entire England. The total area of fallow virgin lands turned into cultivated land at the end of the project constituted 42 million hectares (ha); of this amount 18 million ha target was achieved over 1954–1955. On these lands more than 400 new state farms were organized.

The project was not just about land development; it also encompassed infrastructure building in newly developed areas such as housing, schools, hospitals, kindergartens, child care centres, clubs, roads, bridges, airports, livestock and veterinary facilities, grain storages, and food processing plants. In short, it

was an agro-based comprehensive area development project aimed at lifting agricultural productivity in the entire republic of Kazakhstan. Another major project was breaking the path to human exploration of outer space – launching of earth's artificial satellite (sputniks) followed by Yuri Gagarin's maiden flight into space aboard a spaceship launched from the cosmodrome located in Baikonur in Kazakhstan.

These and many other projects attempted to cultivate a sense of pride among the people in common ideals and values that came to define Soviet culture. In 1977, the USSR's constitution was revised. The new constitution reflected this and other changes that occurred during the post-Stalin period. These changes were explained and summed up by Mikhail Suslov, the CPSU's then chief ideologue. Among the new ideas that he conceptualized, a major one was the emergence of "Soviet people (Советский народ)". It was defined as a new historical commonality of people who have a common territory, economy, socialist culture, a union state of all people and a common goal – the construction of communism. It arose in the USSR as a result of socialist transformation and convergence of working classes and strata of all nations and nationalities.

The Soviet leadership considered the concept of "Soviet people" as an important milestone reached after more than half a century of Soviet nation building. Before that the Soviet Union was described as a "family of fraternal (brotherly) republics" which meant distinct people were living together in a common home as it happens in a family. The concept of "Soviet people" was a step forward toward convergence. It shifted the focus from distinctness to commonality. It was supposed to be a proxy for nationhood for the country which was the Soviet Union. However, there was an important difference. "Soviet people", as a category, was socio-political, ideological and internationalist in nature. It had no ethnic dimensions. So, many people were quite comfortable with their "Soviet" identity. Many were ambivalent, but at least visibly, not averse to it.

For ethnic Russians, "Soviet" identity didn't pose a dilemma because it was "Russian" at the core. Russian language was the official language spoken throughout the Soviet Union. It was the medium of instruction in all institutions of higher learning in all republics. In fact, it was "Russification", a softer version of what was practiced in the Russian empire. The difference was during the empire, non-Russian ethnic groups had minimal or zero contributions to "Russian culture". But "Soviet culture" embraced certain aspects of culture of national republics to give Russian culture a feel of diversity and internationalism. However, "Soviet" identity didn't resonate among other nationalities in the same way as with the Russian people. Many perceived it as a hidden form of Russian dominance. The acceptance of Soviet identity didn't run across equally through all strata of the societies of national republics. The urban elites including representatives of the intelligentsia (writers, poets, journalists, teachers, scientists, etc.) and higher-ups in the party leadership were key stakeholders of Soviet identity in national republics. But whether it was spontaneous or driven by the need to become part of the ruling elites at All-Union level was difficult to tell at that time.

However, the major structural defect of the USSR was the USSR itself, particularly its artificial nature. Many complex arrangements had to be made to hide the truth that it was, in fact, an extension of the Russian SFSR. In other words, it was the Russian empire reincarnated in a new image. With the exit of

the emperors, the Communist Party took the charge of the empire. One example illustrates the complexity of the USSR as a state. While 14 constituent republics of the USSR had their own ruling Communist parties, the biggest and economically most powerful republic, the RSFSR (constituting roughly 58 percent of the USSR) didn't have its own Communist Party. Party branches at different administrative levels in the RSFSR were subordinated to the Central party – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (USSR).

The RSFSR also lacked many institutions which other union republics had. It was because when the USSR was created, many existing institutions of the RSFSR were converted into All-Union institutions to represent the USSR. As a result, in contrast to other Union republics, the Russian SFSR was more than a constituent republic of the USSR; it was, in essence, the whole of the country. But this "semi-dissolved" status of the RSFSR in the USSR came with a responsibility for taking care of the well-being of the entire country. With time, as indicated above, it became a source of discord between the leadership of RSFSR and the central leadership of USSR. For the Central Soviet leadership, there was no alternative other than to deny a separate party organization for the RSFSR because it could have posed a challenge to the leadership of the central CPSU. This arrangement was assiduously protected with application of force, if necessary. For example, in 1949 during Yosif Stalin's rule, senior leaders of the Leningrad regional branch of the CPSU – Peter Popkov, Alexei Kuznetsov, Mikhial Rodionov – and Chairman of Gosplan, the state planning agency, were arrested and convicted on charges that included conspiracy to create a separate Russian Communist Party.[1]

Subsequent Soviet leaders – Nikita S. Khrushchev and Leonid I. Brezhnev – mostly abandoned Stalin-era administrative methods to restrain political opponents in the party and suppress emergence of alternative power centres beyond the control of the CPSU. Still, thanks to their leadership skills and charisma they could manage keeping party organizations of the Russian Federation under direct control of the CPSU. But this equation changed with the emergence of Boris Yeltsin as leader of the RSFSR in 1990 in a changed political context ushered in by consequences of the then Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev's reforms. Taking advantage of the new mood sweeping the masses in Russia, Yeltsin rallied considerable public support behind him as he pushed ahead his rivalry with Gorbachev to establish which jurisdiction Russians considered more consequential in their lives – the Russian SFSR or the USSR. This rivalry for supremacy ended with drawing a curtain on the existence of the Soviet Union.

USSR's disintegration: A view from experience of the second period (1992-2022)

Following disintegration, the USSR didn't vanish from the world. It shrank in size and dissolved in the natural country which was its nucleus and which meant everything for the collective "Soviet" identity.

[1] Ленинградское дело»: почему Сталин бесцеремонно расправился с верхушкой партии города на Неве
https://zen.yandex.ru/media/zagadki_history/leningradskoe-delo-pochemu-stalin-besceremonno-raspravilsia-s-verhushkoi-partii-goroda-na-neve-5e942863984e257a1970e20e

That was Russia within the borders of the former Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The only other republic that absorbed the USSR along with many of its attributes was the Republic of Belarus. In the new era, the RSFSR was renamed as Russian Federation (RF). The newly born state turned its back on Marxist socialism and embraced its historical Russian identity. Much of this identity was wilfully dissolved in the collective "Soviet" identity in the interests of promoting unity and brotherhood across diverse nationalities and ethnic groups in the USSR.

All USSR central-level government institutions were converted into national All-Russian institutions. In many government buildings USSR's state emblem "sickle and hammer" was retained. In 2000, the music of USSR's national anthem with new lyrics written by Nikita Mikhalkov became Russia's national anthem. The USSR was dissolved in the Russian Federation much in the same way it was created out of Russian SFSR in 1922. It validated what was obvious during the entire Soviet era. Unlike other constituent Union Republics, the RSFSR was as much a Republic as it was the whole of the country. It remained semi-dissolved in the USSR. A new organization called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created to manage inter-relationships among the former constituent republics in the post-Soviet era.

Applying hindsight it is fairly easy to say the USSR was destined for extinction because of "defects" in its construction, some which are highlighted above. But that would be simplistic. What we have labelled as "defects" in the wake of USSR's disintegration were, in fact, great ideas which its founders laid in its construction as discussed in the foregoing sections. The country's disintegration largely invalidated the way those ideas were used in Soviet nation building. Proletarian internationalism, the key idea, was supposed to bind diverse nationalities of the country in an enduring relationship of friendship and harmony. However, its effectiveness in blunting nationalism as a centrifugal force in a multinational state was limited. As the country developed, society matured, and generations changed, the spirit of solidarity and convergence embodied by proletarian internationalism faded away. Even the success that was credited to proletarian internationalism was mainly due to other factors. It was strong central leadership and its readiness to exert authority to subdue expression of tribal nationalism, including the use of force should the situation so demands. It was a key feature of three-decade rule by Yosif V. Stalin. He was the most consequential Soviet leader who took charge of the USSR in 1924 when it was just born and upon exit (caused by death in 1953) left it as a developed, prosperous, and mighty superpower.

Stalin's governance style was a strong backup to proletarian internationalism as an idea to hold the diverse, multinational country together around a strong central authority. During his rule, USSR's internal territorial divisions into Union and Autonomous republics and regions, at some point 53 in total, mattered little in decision making and were mostly symbolic. The Article 72 of the Soviet constitution that gave the right of secession to Union republics was lying dormant. No regional leader had the courage to even remember that such a provision exists in the constitution, let alone invoke it. All regional leaders had to take cue from Moscow to make any major policy decision for their republics.

Stalin succeeded in overcoming structural defects in USSR's construction thanks to the governance system that he put in place. It combined ideology with real administrative controls at vulnerable spots in the power structure for maintaining unity and integrity of the Soviet state. The USSR, despite being

inherently a weak federation, was transformed in essence, into a strong unitary state with all real decision making affecting the destiny of the entire country located in Moscow, the national capital. Stalin's rule was more about governance than about mere harping on the merits of Marxist socialism.

For his successor, Nikita S. Khrushchev, "trying not to be Stalin '' became the centrepiece of the governance agenda. It was not just course correction. It was an elaborate state policy formalized at the 20th congress of the CPSU. It came to be known as "exposing the cult of personality (разоблачение культа личности)". In effect, it dismantled the legacy of Stalin's rule casting it largely in a negative light in the public eye. The consequences of this paradigm shift in the governance system were far-reaching for the Soviet state. Many historians believe the outcome of the 20th congress of the CPSU actually set in motion the process of USSR's disintegration. Because it reversed many important policies and relaxed administrative controls that helped contain ambitions of regional leaders and transformed a federation of independent states in all but name, which was the Soviet Union, into a powerful single country with a strong central government in Moscow. The regional leaders realized the element of fear in their dealings with Moscow had gone and they could now bargain with the Centre to advance their interests rather than simply take orders from it. The status of Moscow was gradually transformed from an authoritative central decision maker as well as enforcer into mainly a maintainer of balance among regional interests. The ground that the central authority in Moscow voluntarily ceded to the republics paved the way for centrifugal tendencies in Centre-Republic relations to accumulate strength and become irreversible.

After the exit of Khrushchev, Leonid I. Brezhnev, the next Soviet leader, further relaxed administrative controls that, among others, impacted inter-ethnic relations in the USSR. In this regard, Philip Bobkov, the long-term head of the Fifth Department of the KGB which oversaw tackling of nationalism wrote "By the end of the sixties, the problems of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations became most acute, along with the problems of the Crimean Tatars, Volga Germans and Meskhetians. Those in power stubbornly drove the process deeper; they were more concerned about suppressing it; devoted all efforts to maintaining silence, drowning out national contradictions, caring little about the future. For many years, hotbeds of national strife broke out in various regions of the USSR, which could be extinguished if the state really dealt with these problems. However, the loudly sounding slogan of "indestructible friendship of peoples" imposed a taboo on the slightest attempts to raise this issue. [2]"

The apprehension of national security agencies with regard to negative trends taking root in Soviet society came true when inter-ethnic conflicts escalated into real civil wars at the turn of the 1990s. Proletarian internationalism along with its brainchild "Soviet people (Советский народ)" was burnt in the flames of bloody civil wars that erupted in Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh and elsewhere following disintegration of the Soviet Union. The other grand idea "USSR - family of fraternal peoples" also quickly fizzled out. It was replaced by animosity and outright hostility among peoples, particularly directed

[2] Роль националистических движений в распаде СССР, https://document.wikireading.ru/hTvGHbU7gK

toward Russian people who settled in national republics to carry forward the task of Soviet nation building in those republics.
Interestingly, the very reason why V. I. Lenin abandoned Stalin's idea of incorporating national Soviet republics into the existing Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and instead pushed for creating a new state, which was USSR, on the basis of equality of all component republics, did not materialize. Instead, it validated his worst fears. As discussed in the foregoing, Lenin feared that Stalin's proposal would lead to restoration of the Russian empire in all but name; the Russians would be viewed by other ethnic groups in the same way as the oppressive Tsarist Regime. But exactly that happened after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was an irony that so much accommodation of legitimate concerns of national republics was made from Russia's side including voluntarily giving away historical Russian lands to some of them to avoid being labelled as dominant or oppressive that at the end that fear materialized.

Decades-long material-technical assistance by Russian people to national republics for their fast-paced socio-economic and cultural upliftment at the expense of Russia's own development was equated with colonial rule. Russian communities settled in those republics suddenly became strangers. They ceased to be viewed as "*brothers*", who moved from their birth places and chose to live among them to carry forward the task of nation building in their societies. It was kind of a reawakening to a cruel new reality for Russian-origin people to find themselves as foreigners in those places which they considered as their motherland. In many republics they became targets for persecution by locally empowered ethnic groups. All former national republics except Byelorussia set a course on breaking from the shared "Soviet legacy" and reinventing their historical roots and associated with it tribal nationalism.

The Baltic republics were quickly absorbed in the Western political and military alliances. Russian-origin people settled in those republics were stripped of citizenship of their new countries and subject to discrimination and humiliation in all walks of life. Gradually, these countries became more hostile to the Russian Federation, Russian language and culture. The Asian republics didn't have the same opportunity, but they also pursued the incremental path of distancing from post-Soviet Russia; forcing Russian-speaking people to leave; bringing back their tribal affiliations. In almost all republics, Russian language, which was the lifeblood for their modern-era civilization, was deprived of official status and its use was discouraged. In many of those republics, where Cyrillic alphabet was the script of their written languages, steps have been taken to replace it with Latin.

In short, the sequence of events that unfolded in the aftermath of disintegration of the Soviet state proved the ideological premise of the USSR as a state was more of a delusion than a basis for creating a viable multinational state. If we go back to the question that we posed at the beginning of the paragraph whether the Soviet Union was destined for extinction because of the "defects" in its construction, the answer would be negative. They might have contributed to weakening the Soviet society from within in absence of focus of the authorities on addressing real contemporary issues affecting economic growth, welfare of people and inter-ethnic relations. But they weren't enough to trigger the downfall of the country. The missing element was loss of determination of the central leadership to apply force to subdue rebel leaders much in the same way as it was done during the Stalin-era. Stalin's use of

repression and force was not a goal in itself. it was a tool in absence of other viable options to achieve political objectives of Soviet nation building.

The state had everything in its possession. It had powerful internal security forces, awesome military capabilities and, above all, organizational strength of the CPSU to exert authority and bring order even at the last moment. But the leadership that was in place then was cowardly. It was afraid of doing what was needed to protect the state and secure the people, which was a constitutional duty. For the president of a country, wilful abdication of the most important constitutional duty amounts to treason. In all countries such action is prosecuted. For some mysterious reasons, nothing of the sort happened and the counter-revolution led by Boris Yeltsin was allowed to cruise to victory.

Soviet Union in the second period (1992 – 2022)

The Soviet Union is not a reality in the second period. Yet it survives in the collective memory of millions of people inside and outside the country and continues to stir passions around the world. Where this memory rings the most is the Russian Federation, the former RSFSR, in which the Soviet Union quietly dissolved with all its institutions and all the glories that this internationalist state once symbolized. The Russian Federation became the legal inheritor of the Soviet Union minus its ideology. As discussed in the previous chapters, the USSR was created not only as a nation state but also as the centre of global proletarian revolution, which gave it immense global outreach. While as a state USSR's stakeholders were its citizens, world working classes were stakeholders in its global outreach. For the latter group of stakeholders, the Soviet Union's disintegration came as a net disaster. A large number of poor and exploited people in the developing world tied their hopes of emancipation with the existence of the Soviet state. Many of them passionately believed the dream for a classless, exploitation-free society would come true one day with the support of the Soviet Union.

People who were born and grew up during the period USSR was in existence associate their memories with the role the country played on the global stage, with how it influenced and shaped international relations during the cold war era, and opened new horizons in science and technology, for example, space exploration. People in many developing countries remember the Soviet Union through the prism of assistance it provided to their countries ranging from supporting their national liberation movements to providing wide-ranging economic assistance that helped build national capacities in crucial sectors of the economy. A large number of foreign citizens from developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America studied in the USSR as part of its solidarity with these countries in their socio-economic development through providing their citizens educational and training opportunities in its higher educational institutions. The Soviet Government established in 1960 a new university, famously known as the "Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University", purpose-built to train students from developing countries.

This group of foreign citizens had a unique opportunity to directly experience Soviet society by being a part of that society despite being foreigners. It was largely a result of acceptance by common Soviet people, the mainstream of the society. Immersion of foreign students in the Soviet society was facilitated

by respective higher educational institutions by assigning dedicated groups of Soviet students to groups of foreign students who frequently organized various events to expose foreign students to different aspects of public life in the host country. These included trips to collective farms and state farms in rural areas, industrial units, schools, libraries, movie and drama theatres, summer resorts; celebration of national holidays; participation in subbotniks (voluntary labour) and many other events that provided opportunities for foreign students to closely interact with common Soviet people. Each of these encounters had its own charm. They were also wonderful opportunities for learning beyond classroom lessons. All of these left a deep imprint of that country and its people in the memory of the graduates (Vipuskniki) of Soviet higher educational institutions. Upon return home, no matter which country they were from, these graduates established alumni societies in their respective countries and continued maintaining close relationships with Soviet alumni societies of other countries by organizing conferences, meetings, and other events. What continues uniting them even after the passage of five decades is the memory of unique experiences of living and studying in the Soviet country and many moments of feeling the warmth of friendship and solidarity transmitted during mingling with common Soviet people in numerous events.

The Soviet Union's disintegration sent a massive shock to the economies of many developing countries. The poor developing world lost a reliable friend in dealing with any unexpected emergencies. The principle of proletarian internationalism showed its best in USSR's existence beyond its border, in its global outreach. Officially, the principle of proletarian internationalism in its global application was known as "fulfillment of international duty". The overwhelming majority of citizens in developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have mostly positive views of the USSR and many cherish fond memories of the country. That positive view of their citizens also influences current policy making of their governments with regard to the Russian Federation, the inheritor of the USSR, in international relations. It was the key reason that the United States had limited success in building a global anti-Russia coalition in response to Russia's military operation in Ukraine launched on 24 February 2022. Majority developing countries refused to enlist in the group of countries that the US cobbled together to impose punitive sanctions on Russia.

But as we have discussed at the beginning, the USSR didn't resonate with their citizens in the same way as it did with people from other countries. It was on display when more people took the side of counter-revolution led by Boris Yeltsin than those who supported the last-ditch attempt taken by a group of patriotic leaders during 18-21 August 1991 to protect the Soviet Union from disintegrating. In Russia, many people at that time became confused and were largely indifferent to rapidly unfolding political developments that were leading the country to an uncertain direction. Yet, they believed, based on past experiences, that the collective leadership of the CPSU would somehow bring the political turmoil under control and succeed in keeping the country together. But when eventually the Soviet Union fell apart, the response was mixed. While there was an undercurrent of sadness at the loss of a single great country which was also a superpower, many accepted it as a fait accompli and had no alternative but to sail with the wind.

The reality that unfolded in the immediate aftermath was brutal. It was like a dream cherished and nurtured over the past seventy years shattered overnight. As we have discussed in the beginning, many of the third-generation Soviet citizens emotionally couldn't relate with their country the way their grandparents and parents did. Their understanding of the virtue of living in a socialist society wasn't entirely unquestionable. It was balanced by growing difficulty the state experienced in fulfilling their aspirations. Those aspirations long passed the threshold of the generation of their grandparents who were just happy with their status of proletariat transformed into collective owners that allowed them break free from abject poverty with their basic requirements fulfilled. As a result, socialism as a concept lost its original shine to the new generation of Soviet citizens. Many were open to changes, but few were prepared to see those kinds of changes that washed away their country. The new reality that dawned sharply contradicted all values and societal relations the Soviet Union stood for. The state which was omnipresent in citizens' everyday life suddenly disappeared. People were forced to fend for themselves for which few were prepared. There was an enormous psychological toll on the society when the scale of betrayal by the leadership of the CPSU became apparent. Many leaders shed the ideals of socialism; chose to leave the CPSU in droves; changed colours and emerged as the new leaders of a changed country.

Without any explanation for why it was so, people were told that the market economy was better than the planned economy. Liberal democracy was better than socialism and individualism was better than collectivism. All values, ideals that common Soviet people were born into and brought up were invalidated. In the vacuum that was created, lawlessness, crime and criminal enterprises mushroomed. The country was set on course to degradation and moral bankruptcy. Rural life centered on collective farms and state farms broke down when state support for these farms was withdrawn and the agriculture sector de-collectivized. The next big step toward dismantling socialism and demoralizing the Russian working class was privatization of the vast publicly-owned assets of the country – industrial enterprises and its natural resources, land, mines, etc. The scale of privatization and the way it was done was more about grabbing the country's resources by a few who later emerged as a new class of super rich, known as oligarchs.

When all production assets and capacities created through decades of socialist industrialization at enormous cost and collective sacrifices made by generations of the Soviet working class were sold or otherwise incapacitated, the country was effectively deindustrialized. It also had a tremendous impact on society. It destroyed the bond that held its citizens together in a relationship of mutual support and interdependence symbolized by collectivism (one for all and all for one) that gave them confidence in the future. In all cities and towns, there were mills, factories and other publicly-run enterprises and facilities with a decent workplace for everyone. Every day, people used to wake up in the morning knowing that they had a place to go for work without having to bother about the whim of the employer and the prospect of being laid off. They used to ride public transit at a nominal cost where they could easily mingle with each other, spending time talking with each other and exchanging laughter and jokes. In a broad sense, Soviet society was equal, but that doesn't mean there weren't income gaps between different groups in the population. But those income gaps were small and far from creating social stratification into rich and poor. No one had a feeling of inferiority while mingling with each other. All

public places used to bustle with life. Everyone had a sense of belonging to a greater entity for a great purpose which was the collective. It gave citizens a sense of security, confidence, and pride in their country.

A key goal of privatization was to destroy the social bond, which was collectivism that drew millions of individuals in a relationship akin to a large family. It was the strength that was behind the miracle in socio-economic development that the Soviet Union accomplished in its brief lifetime. The ideologues of privatization had their target of eliminating societal ownership of all means of production. The ultimate goal was to rupture production relations which was characteristic of the socialized production system. They believed it would nullify the prospect of reverting back to socialism. Privatization, carried out like an economic blitzkrieg, drastically changed the society that took shape over the seven decades of socialist construction. Millions of ordinary working people were thrown out of their jobs. They struggled to find alternative livelihoods. Faced with the brutal reality of survival, many became self-centered, cynical and prone to drug and alcohol addiction.

By the end of 1992, the country's population was sharply divided into rich and poor. Almost half of Russia's population was living below the poverty line. For post-Soviet Russia, the entire decade of the 1990s was a period of economic decline, sharp polarization of the society into rich and poor, and outbreak of violent inter-ethnic conflicts. Many citizens of the Russian Federation today look back at this period as a horror and nightmare. The political part of post-Soviet Russia's enthusiastic embrace of the West, as has been discussed in introduction, also failed to materialize. All attempts by Russia to be a part of the West by finding a place in its security and economic alliances as an equal partner were rebuffed. Instead, the country was shown its place as a vanquished in the Cold War. Earlier verbal promises that the Western leaders made to the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to not expand the NATO alliance that could pose a threat to Russia's security were also broken. It was a tough lesson for the people of post-Soviet Russia. Many of them supported Boris Yeltsin to break free from communism and embrace liberal democracy and market economy in the hope of a better tomorrow from their perspective. But their illusions quickly evaporated against the reality of post-Soviet Russia's slide into anarchy, degradation and economic decline. It ended in the melting down of its financial system at the end of 1990s. President Boris Yeltsin, whose popularity by that time hit the bottom, having realized that his time was over handed over power to his hand-picked successor, Vladimir V. Putin.

The change of leadership at the beginning of the 2000s marked a turning point in the evolution of post-Soviet Russia. As we have indicated at the beginning, the second period was also about Russia's coming back, rebuilding the society and reclaiming its status on the world stage. This part of the second period began with assumption of power by President Vladimir Putin. Contrary to the 1990s, this sub-period brought back hope, ignited optimism and charted a new path for independent development. It sharply deviated from the course pursued by Yeltsin that effectively turned Russia into a vassal of the West. Yeltsin handed over to Putin a country lying in ruins, morally devastated, and Putin had to essentially start from zero. All he could marshal at the beginning of his rule were the nuclear arsenal inherited from the Soviet Union, the country's status of permanent member at the UNSC with a veto power, and its abundant natural resources including oil and gas. Capitalizing on these three pillars of

strength, the new leadership during its 23-year rule transformed Russia again into a world power, an independent power centre with the autonomy of strategic decision making and a credible counterweight to US dominance. The economy was revitalized. Yeltsin-era oligarchs wielding enormous control were suppressed and the state came back. It led to an expanding role of the state in a shift from market economy to state capitalism.

But how relevant the Soviet Union is to the Russian Federation during the second period? How does an average citizen look back at the USSR? In the immediate aftermath of the country's disintegration, many people supported Boris Yeltsin, the leader of the counter-revolution. The attitude to the USSR was mostly hostile. Rolling back its values, symbols, icons, wholesale denial of Soviet heritage; and an awkward aspiration to connect with the Russian empire negating the Soviet period became the cornerstone of the beginning of Yeltsin's rule in post-Soviet Russia. The statues of the founding leaders of the Soviet state - Lenin, Stalin, Dzerzhinski and many others - were dismantled in many places of the country. The citadel of the Great October Socialist Revolution, which bore the name of Lenin, the architect of the revolution, was renamed as "Saint Petersburg" (the city of Peter in German language). The zeal to reconnect with the glory of historical Russia symbolized by emperor Peter the Great was so primitive that the city's Russian name immediately before the revolution "Petrograd (the city of Peter in Russian)" was ignored in renaming the city of Lenin (Leningrad). The names of dozens of Soviet cities, townships as well as thousands of streets were changed. Even the great Soviet writer, Maxim Gorky, wasn't spared from this spree. Moscow's central street bearing his name, Gorky Street, was also renamed. But time puts everything in its place. Thirty years later, many wonder whether committing those excesses were appropriate in the light of the lessons learned, particularly when gains were compared with losses. Nostalgia about the Soviet period grips a significant part of Russia's population today. Many feel disappointed and pain at the loss of a great country, which was their Motherland. This feeling is unlikely to ever leave them.

At the official level, too, there has been reassessment of the USSR. President Putin called the disintegration of the USSR a great tragedy for Russia. The President, in fact, echoed a sentiment shared by millions of citizens of his country. Soviet-era symbolic, rituals, and practices have also started creeping back into the mainstream of the society. As has been stated in the foregoing, the Soviet Union's national anthem reworded by poet Nikita Mikhalkov is now the national anthem of the Russian Federation. The Soviet Union's national flag is widely displayed alongside Russia's tricolour. In many parts of the country authorities aren't averse to local citizens' initiatives to restore the glory of the past by erecting monuments to Lenin and Stalin. Since 2005 about one hundred monuments to Yosif Stalin have been erected in Russia. The Soviet Union's emblem is still in place in many government buildings. The Soviet-era practice of fostering patriotism through "military-patriotic upbringing (военно-политическое воспитание)" has also come back. The State Duma took a decision in June 2022 to start an All-Russia movement of children and youth patterned on the Soviet era Pioneer organization. Most recently, the Soviet-era system of higher education which was discarded in favour of the Western system in a wild race to embrace the West has been restored. In short, wholesale rejection of the Soviet past has ended. Many even dream of the seemingly impossible – getting back the Soviet Union.

What could have been done differently in the first period that wouldn't have led to the second period?

In the introduction, we posed this question. The following is an attempt to answer this question, which is not definitive. It rather considers a scenario "what if", what could have happened, if certain actions weren't taken or taken and implemented in different ways.
The second period owes its origin to the Soviet Union's derailing from the revolutionary path of waging a relentless struggle with capitalism to score the final victory of socialism over capitalism. That happened following the death of Yosif Stalin in 1953, the leader who ruled the country for three decades and transformed it into a kind of global power that was adored, respected and feared across the world. Global capitalist system during this period saw for it an existential challenge in the Soviet Union-led socialist system. The transition of power in the wake of Stalin's death didn't happen in the way that would have maintained continuity in the Soviet Union's socialist construction both at home and abroad. Stalin didn't have time to groom his successor although often he uttered preferences for several leaders. In that list, the name of Nikita Sergeievich Khrushchev, the leader who prevailed in the power struggle that broke out in the CPSU after Stalin's death and succeeded in capturing power, was missing. Having emerged as the top leader, Khrushchev turned his focus on consolidating his grip on power by killing and sidelining veteran party leaders who were close associates of Yosif Stalin. An abrupt break from Stalin's course of development, dismantling his legacy and casting his three-decade rule largely in a negative light became Khrushchev's main platform for setting a new course for the Soviet Union's own development as well as its leadership in its global outreach. The 20th congress of the CPSU held in February 1956 formalized this platform into a state policy that continued till the fall of the Soviet Union. .

This paradigm shift was a watershed moment for the global socialist movement as well as the Soviet Union's own development. The leadership of the Chinese Communist Party called it betrayal and broke ranks with the CPSU. It triggered the division of the world socialist movement which weakened the ideological struggle between capitalism and socialism globally and benefitted the capitalist world. It also created a golden opportunity for the world capitalist system to sow seeds of further discord in the socialist camp and turn the ideological rivalry between the Soviet Union and China into outright hostility causing further damage to the world socialist movement. The division of the world socialist camp also sowed discord in Soviet society paving the way for emergence of fault lines in the society of which we talked in the foregoing. The credibility of the CPSU leadership was called into question.

Many equated official denial of the legacy of Yosif Stalin with delegitimizing the rule of the CPSU in the public eye. Many believe the decisions of the 20th congress of the CPSU pivoted the country away from the revolutionary path. It triggered such changes in the economy and the society that actually set in

motion the process of USSR's disintegration. The opposite camp, the US-led global capitalism, took note of the fateful changes for the country that took place at the 20th CPSU congress. Discrediting the architect of the Soviet Union's decisive victory over German fascism and tarnishing his legacy of state building by his own party came as a wonderful opportunity for the West to double down on its propaganda efforts to discredit the socialist system and drive wedge in Soviet society. As a result, the image of Yosif Stalin that was imposed on the society from the top was one of a cruel, blood-thirsty executioner. This image narrowed the essence of Stalin's rule to killing many innocent people, torturing and sending people to labour camps (gulags) and ignored his contributions to building the USSR and transforming it into a superpower.

During the Stalin-era, the Soviet Union's strength was perceived worldwide both economically and militarily. It was a counterweight to the world capitalist system not only in terms of military might but also economic power deriving strength from its centrally planned economy and societal ownership of the means of production. The Soviet model of economy demonstrated its superiority during the 1930s, the period of socialist industrialization when the capitalist world was mired in deep recession. It demonstrated excellence during the WWII and also during the period of post-war reconstruction. The key source of strength of the centrally planned economy was the selfless labour of the working class, the spirit of mobilization, efficient supply chain management, strict discipline across the line of management of the production chain and accountability from production managers at all levels for outputs produced against consumption of resources; and above all, strict oversight to eliminate corruption, which was rare in those days. The state-controlled publicly-owned means of production were treated as truly belonging to the people serving in the interests of all. Government officials responsible for running the economy couldn't think of themselves other than custodians of public property and managers of socialized production. The Soviet Union during Stalin's rule didn't have to rely on selling natural resources to generate revenues for funding its budget. In 1950, the share of oil and gas in the Soviet Union's export trade was less than 4 percent.

As we have noted in the foregoing, discarding governance mechanisms that Yosif V. Stalin put in place over the years including those to make the economy work for the benefit of the people and the country's rapid socialist development robbed the planned economy of its advantage over the capitalist market economy. Khrushchev's turn around drew a limit to the ideological battle between socialism and capitalism on the question of economy, which was not in favour of socialism. At that time, the key strength of the planned economy - mobilization and selfless labour of citizens - was approaching limits with the ending of the extraordinary times the country went through. The challenge then was to find additional tools, sort of Marxist socialism's own answer to sustain growth momentum of the planned economy and ensure its competitive edge over the capitalist market economy.

That wasn't an easy task. It required innovative thinking and bold leadership from the CPSU. Because the Marxist ideology has no ready-made answers on how to manage the economy after the proletariat conquers political power and private ownership of the means of production is abolished. Immediately after the revolution, war communism was put in place as an approach to run the economy which was consistent with Marxism in letter and spirit. But the approach didn't work because the consequences

were contrary to expectations. The Bolshevik Government led by V.I. Lenin abandoned war communism in 1920 and introduced in its place New Economic Policy which was restoration of capitalism. It was billed as a necessary measure for an interim period to use capitalism to create the ground for building socialism, in other words, building socialism with the help of capitalism. After Lenin's death, Stalin rolled back NEP and proceeded to build socialism through mobilization of domestic resources which he accomplished in the mid-1930s through socialist industrialization, Cultural Revolution and collectivization of agriculture. It was all about the Soviet experience of management of a socialized economy.

But as indicated above, in the 1950s, there was a need to do more in terms of innovation of concepts and methods to upgrade those aspects that could sustain dynamic growth of the planned economy. These include, among others, supply chain management, rational consumption of resources, increasing productivity of labour, introduction of new technologies and production processes to remain globally competitive, etc. The Soviet Union then had everything needed to cope with this challenge - developed industrial base, formidable pool of scientific talent, a well-trained workforce with advanced skills and knowledge. But Nikita Khrushchev chose not to travel along this path. Instead, he chose the one that he thought would be risk free to his leadership. It was bringing back concepts of capitalism in disguise using different names to run the economy. It was inherently contradictory because in the Soviet economy, private ownership, which is the engine of growth of capitalism, was non-existent and all productive assets and resources of the country belonged to the people. It did more harm than good because it deprived visible advantages of central planning over market economy.

As expected, Khrushchev's experiments to adapt capitalism to run the socialized economy ended in failure. The turn-around impacted the morale of Soviet society and the cause of ideological struggle between socialism and capitalism globally. Ideologically, it was an acknowledgement that Marxism had little to offer apart from abolishing private ownership, nationalization and state-control of all productive assets and resources on behalf of the people and promoting the spirit of collectivism and self-sacrifice in the society. It was a major defeat on the ideological front also because it signalled Marxist socialism had exhausted potential for being a viable alternative to capitalism in the long term. Instead of developing Marxism from where Karl Marx left it to prepare the economic base for transition to communism, the doctrine was transformed into a kind of religious dogma under the pretext of defending the purity of Marxism from the attack of revisionists. Khrushchev thus effectively lost the real ideological battle of socialism to capitalism. And probably, unknowingly, set the stage for deepening contradictions of Soviet society which for many years lay dormant to the point that the existence of the Soviet state would one day be threatened. Apart from the setback in the economy, Khrushchev's paradigm change also demoralized politics by turning Stalin-era CPSU's ironclad commitment to socialism into a sort of formality, a mere slogan. Honesty, devotion and dedication to Marxist socialism in CPSU's rank and file were replaced by duplicity and double-speak.

People quickly realized what party leaders utter in meetings and public gatherings, they don't actually mean it. As a result, the CPSU took the turn to convert from being a party of passionate believers in the ideals of Marxist socialism to opportunity seekers with little faith in ideology and even hostile to it. With time the CPSU lost its original revolutionary character and became an administrative-cum-party

bureaucracy. To get an entry into this system, the key requirement was membership in the party and the opportunists took this advantage. Gradually they moved upward in the party bureaucracy resulting in the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin at the helm of power in the mid-1980s. In the management of the economy, concepts of capitalism adapted to run industrial enterprises also introduced “greed” named as “material interest” (материалная заинтересованность) as an incentive for higher production. It also fostered a sense of ownership among officials who were responsible for management of socialized production.

It was in stark contrast with the Stalin era, when government officials in charge of running the economy couldn’t think of themselves other than custodians of people’s property. The competition between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp that was visible in the outside world was in effect military confrontation for expanding each other’s sphere of influence. However, despite all these changes, the Soviet economy still grew. The Soviet Union had many achievements to impress the world and also for its people to feel proud. For much of the outside world, the Soviet Union continued to remain a success story despite all its internal weaknesses. How could this happen?

The simplest explanation was “Inertia of motion.” The giant industrial, scientific and technical base that Yosif Stalin created and left behind in the beginning of the 1950s had enough residual strength to push the country along the path of glory, growth and prosperity. The major achievements that brought fame for the country in atomic energy, nuclear weapons and space exploration in the 1950s and onward were made possible thanks to the material and technical foundation created in the Stalin era. The declining contribution of the industrial sector to gross national income was compensated by rising share of export of natural resources, principally oil and gas. In its global outreach, the Soviet Union maintained its influence by supporting anti-colonial national liberation movements; promoting socialist revolutions where possible and patronizing local communist and leftist parties adhering to Marxist socialism.

Despite heating up military confrontation with the US-led Western block, which reached climax in 1962 with the Soviet Union stationing nuclear missiles in Cuba, the Soviet Union also worked toward an accommodation with the West that wouldn't allow cold war turning into a real full blown war. Following the Cuban missile crisis and the ouster from power of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964 in a palace coup, the new CPSU leadership headed by General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev adopted a more conciliatory approach seeking an accommodation with the West. This approach was met with enthusiastic support from then Chancellor of West Germany, Willy Brandt, who unveiled his own “Ostpolitik (Eastern Policy)” and pressed ahead with opening a new chapter in dealing with the Eastern bloc.

As a result, a number of agreements were concluded that led to thawing of frozen relations between the two sides engaged in the Cold War. This period, the end of the 1960s, is known as “detente” from the Western perspective” and “relaxation of international tensions (Разрядка международной напряжённости)” from the Soviet side. To further advance the process of easing hostility, which was the official foreign policy objective, the Soviet Government came up with a new initiative known as “Peaceful coexistence of states with different different social systems (Мирное сосуществование государств с различным общественным строем)”.

Apparently, the Soviet Government's effort to tone down the tensions and lower the risk of nuclear confrontation with the West looked like a responsible act in international relations during that period which benefited the world. But from the perspective of socialism's victory over capitalism, which the USSR symbolized, it was a setback and another moment of defeat. Because the US-led Western alliance didn't buy into the Soviet concept of "Peaceful coexistence of states with different social systems" . In contrast, it assiduously pursued the goal of destroying socialism as an alternative to capitalism and the USSR as well. Interestingly, it is global capitalism led by the US which fought the true class struggle against socialism as opposed to the USSR, that was supposed to take the fight to capitalism and achieve victory for socialism following the rules of class struggle consistent with Marxist doctrine.

If we look into the question which side had a bigger stake in detente, it was not the US and the Western alliance. It was the Soviet Union. For the Western alliance, detente was an opportunity to engage with the Soviet Union and the Eastern block and develop cooperation only in those areas that would give advantage to it in its cold war/class struggle with the Soviet Union. It included arms control, cooperation in space exploration, and most importantly, launching psychological war against the core values of the Soviet society using all opportunities of direct interaction with the Soviet civil society, which in the USSR was known as people's intelligentsia (народная интелигенция) - academicians, scientists, representatives of art and culture, economists, etc.

The goal of this psychological war was to turn people's intelligentsia as much as possible into anti-people's intelligentsia. It was done by promoting dissidents, sowing suspicions in the society about supremacy of socialist values and the Soviet way of life. It fostered a sense across the Soviet society that the socialist way of life was inherently inferior to capitalism and the society of consumerism. Academic exchanges and visits by government officials, economists to Western institutions at different levels were used as opportunities to further discredit Marxist socialism.

Most Soviet counterparts used to return home from such exchanges with their Western counterparts convinced that Marxist socialism exhausted its potential in the USSR and the future lies with capitalism. Soviet national culture, the brightest aspect of socialist construction in the USSR, was also infiltrated by local agents of Western pop culture and rock music. The broad consensus among a section of the ruling party elites since the mid-1970s was carrying forward the policy of peaceful coexistence with the West to full integration with the West as an equal partner. But that was something the West was unwilling to do. Its goal was complete destruction of the socialist system and the Soviet Union which it accomplished in 1992 with help of Gorbachev and Yeltsin.

However, as we have emphasized in the foregoing chapters, despite all its internal weaknesses and shortcomings, the Soviet Union's destruction wasn't preordained. It was the cowardly leadership that was in place then that wilfully gave up on its key constitutional duty - protecting the state and securing the welfare of its citizens.